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SAMUEL KIRKLAND'S MISSION TO THE IROQUOIS

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE DIVINITY SCHOOL IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF CHURCH HISTORY
1932

By
HERBERT JOHN LENNOX

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SAMUEL KIRKLAND'S MISSION TO THE IROQUOIS

A revival of interest in Indian Missions followed the Religious Awakening of New England (1741-45). One of the ministers who was interested in the revival, Eleazer, Wheelock, took a young Indian, Samson Occom, into his home to train him for missionary service to his people, and encouraged with the success of this pupil, began to extend his activities. Thus developed the Indian Charity School at Lebanon, Connecticut. Pupils were obtained from the neighboring tribes as well as from the Delawares and Iroquois and Wheelock hoped to use these Indians as schoolmasters for small Indian schools which were to be set up in the Iroquois territory.

Wheelock was ready to launch the latter part of this program in the fall of 1764 and was fortunate in having a white student, Samuel Kirkland, who had been training for this service since 1760. Kirkland came to the school in 1760 and after two years training at Lebanon, had gone to the College of New Jersey where he had received further preparation. Kirkland, with a young Indian, Joseph Wooley, were to be the advance guard; followed by a much larger procession in the following spring.

Sir William Johnson, the Indian Agent in charge of the Iroquois, was anxious to have a missionary locate among the semi-hostile Senecas, since the Episcopal missionaries of his own church would not venture so far west; preferring the much easier location among the Mohawks.[1] Wheelock, on the other hand, was so

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[1]Hugh Hastings, Ecclesiastical Records of the State of New York, V, (1905), 3400.

much concerned with affairs at Lebanon, that he had not acquainted himself regarding the location of the Senecas, and was happy to have Johnson's cooperation.

Kirkland was very poorly equipped for this mission; lacking even the customary presents for the Indians,[2] and after eighteen months of combating famine and the hostility of the Indians, he was forced to retire. The two other white missionaries and the four Indian school-teachers who had followed Kirkland in the spring of 1765, faced little better. Titus Smith had gone to the southern Oneida tribe at Jeningo and Onohoquaga, but famine and the competition of a rival missionary society had forced him to retire.[3] Theophilus Chamberlain attempted to locate his mission at Canajoharie on the Mohawk River, but William Johnson, the Indian Agent, wished to have Episcopal missionaries serve these Indians, and opposed the mission,[4] and by 1767 Chamberlain was also ready to retire. Each of these missionaries had Indians under them who were attempting to operate Indian schools, but David Fowler, another Indian, was in full charge of a school at Old Oneida. Here he found the Indians indifferent to his project[5] and before he could establish his work, a severe famine forced him to retire.

Wheelock was not discouraged, however, since Samson Occom

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[2]Kirkland to Wheelock, January 22, 1765, Eleazer Wheelock's A Plain and Faithful Narrative of the Original Design, Rise, Progress, and Present State of the Indian Charity School at Lebanon, in Connecticut, III, (Boston, 1763), 37.

[3]F. Chase, History of Dartmouth, (1st ed.; Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1891), p. 44.

[4]Johnson to Henry Barclay, March 30, 1763, as quoted in Johnson Papers, IV, 72-73.

[5]David Fowler to Wheelock, May 29, 1765, James Dow McCallum, Letters of Eleazer Wheelock's Indians, Dartmouth College Manuscript Series, Number I, (Hanover, New Hampshire, 1932), pp. 90-91.

with Nathaniel Whitaker had made a very successful tour of England and Scotland (1765-67) where they collected about 12000 for the Indian School. There was considerable suspicion, however, that this money would not be used for Indian education, and an English Trust had been organized to handle the money collected in that country, while the Scotch Evangelicals kept their fund under their own control. Wheelock planned a new mission to be set up among the Oneidas, and after Kirkland had been ordained, a large force set out for that place, in the summer of 1766.

David McClure and Aaron Kinne, two white students from the Indian Charity School, were to serve under Kirkland to learn the language, while David Fowler and a few other Indians were to carry their part of the school teaching. Kirkland was by no means discouraged with his experiences among the Senecas and entered whole-heartedly into this new mission. A road was cut through the woods to Fort Stanwix, and a small log house was erected as a parsonage while the Indians were encouraged to erect similar homes for themselves. He so far succeeded that by the fall of 1767, there were over seventeen log huts; either erected or in the process of construction.[6]

The Indians also responded to the preaching of the new missionary, and considerable religious enthusiasm was aroused. Kirkland noted for one service:

> "A more solemn Assembly I never saw, not one appeared trifling or unconcerned and many flowed in tears. My Exercise was two Hours and half long."[7]

The preaching was of the Jonathan Edwards' type, and the Indians showed much the same emotions as were found among the whites.

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[6]Ralph Wheelock's Journal, as quoted in A Plain and Faithful Narrative...., V, 30.

[7]Kirkland to Wheelock, April 12, 1768. Op. cit., pp. 60-61.

However, Kirkland did not permit this enthusiasm to continue without direction, and in the first part of his mission, introduced his temperance program.

Early in the fall of 1766, Kirkland determined to destroy the rum traffic which was causing such distress. Both the men and women would become drunk and in this condition the Indians lapsed into the most savage state. He called the Indians together and explained the situation to them, giving six days for consideration. At the end of that period they unanimously agreed to banish rum from the tribe and for a period of three months succeeded very well. When the traders found their business falling off however, they came into the village and offered eighty casks of rum, free of charge, if the Indians would break their resolutions.[8] This continual effort was too much for the Indians and soon a few weaker ones took up the old habits to be followed by an increasing number. Kirkland fought bitterly against this traffic and up to the time of the Revolutionary War, succeeded in keeping many of his church members from breaking their pledges.

Another serious blow which fell upon the mission in this early period was a series of famines which came in regular succession during the summers of 1765, 1766, and 1767.[9] During the summer of 1767 the situation became so desperate at the mission that Kirkland released McClure, Kinne, Joseph Johnson, and Jacob Fowler; only David Fowler and his wife remained with Kirkland. At this time Kirkland wrote in a letter:

> "From week to week I am obliged to go Eeling with the Indians at Oneida Lake for my Substinence. I

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[8]Letter of Wheelock to Whitaker, April 11, 1767, as quoted in Wheelock's, A Plain and Faithful Narrative...., V, 10.

[9]Kirkland to Wheelock, July 5, 1767. Ibid., p. 18.

> have lodged and slept with them till I am lousy as a Dog.....They are now half starved. Some of them have no more than two quarts of Corn."[10]

The Indians were in a desperate plight. He describes one family as follows:

> "They have had nothing these ten days but what I have given them. They have only each an old Blanket, not worth Six pence, where with to buy any Thing; and begging here at this Season would be very poor Business."[11]

Wheelock was unable to meet this situation. The fund collected by Occom in England was held by a Trust who could not appreciate the situation and even though Wheelock made desperate attempts to raise money in this country,[12] little was done and when a new crop came in the spring, the work of the previous year was largely destroyed. This same thing happened repeatedly during Kirkland's long ministry, and at no time was he able to carry the Indians through the crisis although he always gave every cent he had.

During these discouraging times, the relations between Wheelock and Kirkland began to be strained. Ralph, the son of the elder Wheelock, was of a domineering temperament, and during his visits to Oneida in 1766 and 1767, he gave the Indians to understand that he was the real director of the mission and Kirkland was but a servant to his father. Of course Kirkland resented such treatment, and when Ralph Wheelock made his visit in 1768, both Kirkland and Phineas Dodge hurried back to New England rather than attempt to cooperate with him.

The final break with Wheelock came in 1770, over the question of finances. Strange to say, Kirkland, up to this time,

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[10] Ibid., p. 18.

[11] Ibid., p. 18.

[12] During the year 1767 Wheelock spent £1000 on the school and his missions.

had never received a salary, but had been content with such supplies as Wheelock sent to the mission. After 1768 Wheelock turned his attention more and more to the education of white youth and by 1770 was located at Hanover, New Hampshire, at Dartmouth College. Wheelock had tried to obtain a site for the school in the Iroquois country, but he was very unfortunate in sending a representative to the Treaty of Fort Stanwix, in 1768, who used so little tact that William Johnson, the powerful Indian Agent, became very bitter toward the New England Clergy, and refused to give them any cooperation. In this emergency, Wheelock had turned to New Hampshire, but with the many duties of this new school, had neglected Kirkland, who was his last missionary.

Kirkland had married in the fall of 1768, and needed a regular salary; and when he went east for money in 1770, he found that Wheelock had made no provision for him. Accordingly, he went to Boston and offered his services to the rival missionary board, "The Company for the Propagation of the Gospel in New England." This was the missionary society formed in the time of John Eliot, but at this period was working in close cooperation with certain faculty members of Harvard College, who were known as the "Harvard Corporation." This group had charge of the Daniel Williams Legacy which had come to them in 1725. They were very anxious to have Kirkland come into their employ and immediately made arrangements for his salary. In 1773, the Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge, assumed one half of the salary while the Harvard Corporation took the other half. At this time Kirkland was to receive 180 yearly which was to cover both his salary and that of his assistant's.

Wheelock was very much opposed to Kirkland's step, and for several months a bitter paper war ensued but in October, 1771, the two parties got together and drew up articles of agree-

ment which finally reestablished peaceful relationships. The mission prospered from 1770-74. More adequate finances permitted Kirkland to erect a larger home for his family and after much planning, finally completed a church which measured 36 x 28 x 18' and was a typical New England structure. Schools were also opened with noticeable success manifested in the singing classes. Farming had a place in the program, and Kirkland managed to get some equipment for this work.

All was not peaceful, however. The French Jesuits were present in the Indian country, and did all they could to stir up opposition against Kirkland, while the Indian war scares of 1774 brought added dissension. Nevertheless, Kirkland was master of the situation and was making some progress.

THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR

The Revolutionary War came in the midst of this great effort of Kirkland's and completely destroyed the mission. On account of the Indian war scares preceding 1774, Mrs. Kirkland found it necessary to move back to Stockbridge, Massachusetts, and from this time until 1792, Kirkland had the extra financial burden of keeping up two households.

Kirkland was an ardent patriot and entered enthusiastically into the Revolution. Although he was far removed from the early war activities of New England, yet he kept himself informed of the events taking place there and did what he could to arouse the Indians to the cause of the colonists. The Indians wanted to know about the English-American quarrel, and Kirkland thought that his

> "interpretations of the doings of Congress to a number of Sachems had done more real service to

the cause of the country or the cause of truth and justice than 500 of presents."[13]

The old Indian Agent, William Johnson, had died in 1774, and the successor, Guy Johnson, lacked the tact of his father-in-law. Consequently, Kirkland and Guy Johnson were soon engaged in quarrels which finally came to the point where Johnson ordered the missionary to leave the field and circulated vicious rumors about him among the Indians.[14]

Kirkland had to leave his mission in July, 1775, but instead of giving up his efforts for the American Cause, he went to Philadelphia where the Continental Congress was in session. There he was influential in having an Indian Department established with Commissioners appointed for each of the three subdivisions into which the country had been divided[15] and he was employed to secure the friendship of the Six Nations, and "continue them in a state of Neutrality....."[16]

As the war progressed, the western nations of the Iroquois went over to the British side while the majority of the Oneidas finally joined the Americans. Fort Stanwix (Rome) was the principal fort in this territory, and the Americans managed to hold this against the attack of St. Leger and his Indians. Kirkland became Chaplain of this fort some time before the battle of Oriskany, and induced the Oneidas to refrain from following the examples of their western neighbors.

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[13]Kirkland to the New York Provincial Congress, June 9, 1775, as quoted in American Archives, Series IV, Vol. II, 309-10.

[14]Kirkland to Guy Johnson, as quoted in Lathrop, Life of Samuel Kirkland, (1st ed.; Boston; Chas. Little & James Brown, 1847), Part II, Vol. XXV, 234-5.

[15]W. L. Stone, Life of Joseph Brant, (1st ed.; Albany; J. Munsell, 1865), I, 93.

[16]Op. cit., pp. 1883-4.

The years 1777-82 were marked with a series of border attacks by Tories and Indians, the latter under the skillful leadership of Joseph Brant, the Mohawk, and one time student of Wheelock's. By 1779 many of the frontier settlements along the Mohawk or the Susquehanna were attacked and destroyed; the local militia being unable to cope with the combined forces of the Tories and Indians. Finally, General Washington sent an army into the heart of the Indian country. This was led by Major General John Sullivan and Kirkland went along as a Chaplain. The Oneidas were expected to send a large force, but their hostile neighbors, so frightened them, that but very few accompanied the army.

Sullivan destroyed the Indian towns and crops of central New York, but that did not keep the Indians from making repeated counter attacks on the frontier settlements. In the midst of these wars, 1779-82, Fort Stanwix was destroyed and the hostile Indians invaded the frontier settlements all the way to Albany.[17]

The Americans found it necessary to remove the Oneidas to Schenectady, and here they were poorly provided for until the end of the war. Kirkland remained with the Indians until they were taken to Schenectady, and then he made his headquarters at Stockbridge, Massachusetts.

The Revolutionary War had completely ruined the Oneida mission. Besides depriving the Indians of regular worship services from 1776 to 1784, it had reduced them to the greatest poverty; the Indian villages had been burned by hostile war parties, and both the church and Kirkland's parsonage were

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[17] G. Clinton to James Duane, October 29, 1780, as quoted in Clinton Papers, VI, 345-6.

destroyed. The Indian Confederacy was divided and such hatreds survived the war, that it was impossible for amiable relations to be established for several years.

Kirkland was left in dreadful financial straits. His regular salary had been cut off and he had incurred heavy debts during the time he attempted to relieve the suffering of the Indians. His salary had not been paid during the war, and when a settlement was made, it was much less than his original claim.[18]

Even worse than this financial condition was the spiritual condition of the Indians. He says,

> "Most of my people are degenerated as much as our paper currency depreciated in the time of the war. I shall have a very loud call to preach up reformation, industry, (and) cleanliness before I can consistently hold up much encouragement of good either as to the present or future life."[19]

The Oneida mission was really saved at this time with the opportune immigration of the Brothertown and Stockbridge Indians to the Oneida territory. It had been the practice among the Iroquois to admit outside Indian tribes to their lands and when these New England Indians applied for lands, they were cordially welcomed. The Brothertown Indians were the remnants of the Mohegan and Narragansett tribes which had located near the towns of Charlestown, Rhode Island, Groton, Storington, Maritic, Farmington, and Mohegan in Connecticut; Montauk on Long Island, and were organized by Samson Occom, David and Jacob Fowler, and Joseph Johnson. The name "Brothertown" was assumed at this time because they planned to live as brothers. The Stockbridge tribe

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[18]Action of the Board of Correspondents of the Scotch Society, April 7, 1786, as quoted in Kirkland Papers.

[19]Kirkland to Jerusha Kirkland, September 10, 1785, Kirkland Papers.

was the remnants of the group in Massachusetts who had earlier been under the missionary care of John Sergeant and Jonathan Edwards.

Both these groups were more highly civilized than the Oneidas, and when they moved into the Oneida country, they brought with them their religious enthusiasm. It was this spirit which rallied the few faithful Oneidas together, until Kirkland could reestablish his mission. Even then, however, there were several new problems which were to confront him at this time.

The French Jesuit influence had never died out among the Oneidas, and after the war there were forces aroused which intensified this religious spirit. One of the young Oneidas had been taken to France by Lafayette and after a few years, returned with great scorn for Kirkland's mission. It was also during the war that Peter Penet had come to the colonies. He was a Frenchman and for a time had considerable influence with Washington and other American leaders. After the war he attempted to establish a trading company at Schenectady and in his dealings with the Oneidas, urged them to accept a French Catholic priest. So forceful was he, that the Indians readily consented and for a time Kirkland was forced to see several of his church members worshipping with this priest.

Penet was not satisfied with these religious innovations, but hoped to revamp the political life as well. Accordingly, he suggested that the Indians give him a tract of land 100 miles square so that he could settle a French colony, and in time bring a French Bishop. The Indians consented to the extent of giving him a tract of land 100 square miles and would probably have gone further had not Governor Clinton advised them against it.[20]

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[20] Kirkland's Journal, November 12, 1790.

The French Jesuit priest was ordered to leave the country, but many of the Indians continued to go to St. Regis for baptisms and funerals. The French priests did not demand the same type of program as did Kirkland, and were also more lenient with the Indian customs. Rum drinking was not condemned and they did not require such strict regulations for Baptism. Consequently, for several years the old Indian customs continued under the cloak of the French Catholic Church and about the year 1800 the Indians openly threw off this cloak and became thorough Pagans. Before the death of Kirkland, Pagan religious services were held with dogs and tobacco used as sacrifices and the old ritual revived under a native priesthood. It is fair to note at this point that the Indians did not revert to this type of worship until they realized that they had been duped in their dealings with the whites.

The white encroachment on the Indian lands was inevitable. As early as 1764, when Kirkland first came to the Indian country, he found a string of English settlements reaching from Albany to German Flats on the Mohawk, and by 1768 these settlements had so increased that the Property Line of that year was established to check this white advance. After the war, the whites flooded into the Indian country. Mrs. Lois Kimball Mathews[21] records that three streams of migration came into the rich lands of central New York at this time; one up the Mohawk River; another up the Susquehanna River to Tioga Point, and then east and west, while the third came across the Hudson River from Connecticut and then went down the Unadilla and Susquehanna into the Genesee country.

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[21] The Expansion of New England, (1st ed.; Houghton Mifflin Company, 1909), pp. 153 ff.

An example of the result of this immigration might be taken from the records of Whitestown. In 1788 this place contained less than 200 inhabitants, but in 1810 so great had been the increase that this same territory had a population of 280,319.

The Oneida Indians were practically surrounded by whites by 1792, and many of these were of low type. While Kirkland thought that the white settlers would prove a good example to the Indians, he failed to consider that the Indians would generally make their company with the lower class of the whites. Before the end of the century, it was evident that the Indians were deteriorating from this close contact with the whites.

Kirkland favored this white influx of population and in the years of the great treaties, 1784-94, urged the Indians to lease or sell their lands. He even cooperated with the lawless Livingston group who attempted to lease the entire lands of the Indians for a period of 999 years.[22] Later during the Phelps and Gorham Treaty of 1788, he did not oppose crooked dealings with the Indians, except to withdraw from the white group.[23] There were at least two reasons why Kirkland cooperated with these forces which were to obtain the lands of the Indians: one was for the personal gain which might accrue to him, and the other was the firm conviction that the Indians would never take up agriculture unless they were forced to do so. Evidence tends to show that Kirkland had long planned to help civilize the tribes by introducing agriculture, but he was continually defeated when the Indians would drop everything and go off on their hunts.

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[22] O. Turner, History of the Pioneer Settlement of the Phelps and Gorham Purchase, (1st ed.; Rochester, 1851), pp. 110-111.

[23] Papers of the Indian Commissioners, I, 158-59.

This program for the civilization and education of the Indians was finally begun in 1793. Just before this time the uprisings of the Indians in the northwest had brought the general Indian problem to the attention of the government, and Kirkland on two different occasions (1791 and 1792) was called upon to bring delegations of the Indians to Philadelphia. It was on this latter visit that Kirkland presented his program.

His idea was to erect a school in the vicinity of the Oneidas where the students would come into close touch with the whites. Here he hoped to prepare the most promising Indian pupils for leadership in teaching smaller schools which were to be placed in all parts of the Iroquois Reservations. To encourage agriculture and general improvements, blacksmiths and carpenters were to be introduced; also farmers. These people were to be located at the central villages. Over all of them, a superintendent was to be placed, who would direct the entire venture. The Federal Government endorsed this pland and appropriated $1500 annually for twenty-one years.[24] Prizes were to be given to encourage both the pupils in the schools and the adults on the farms.

This plan did not succeed. Suitable leadership was not obtained for the adult educational program, and the interest of the government turned to other pressing problems after General Wayne had defeated the Indians in the northwest.

Kirkland, however, was not defeated and when one part of his plan failed, he turned to the project of an Indian Academy.

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[24]Kirkland to Peter Thatcher, June 6, 1792, Documentary History of Hamilton College, pp. 43-45.

Here he hoped to educate his own leadership and thus still save the general project. It is with this effort that Hamilton Academy had its birth. Lonehanded, Kirkland circulated a subscription and did whatever else was necessary to organize the school. A charter was finally granted by the State in the spring of 1793, and a building was begun on the present site of Hamilton College that same year. A few Indian pupils attended for a while, but soon they lost interest and during the financial panic of 1793-5, the school was practically abandoned. Kirkland continued to give of his private means until a little later the school was reorganized as Hamilton College for white students.

Kirkland had centered everything on this project and until the end of his life in 1808, never gave up hope that he might still carry out some part of his project. The mission never responded to his efforts, and, with the resusitation of the Pagan worship, his mission dwindled until at his death, his church had but "one male and twleve females."

Several factors account for this apparent failure, and as a conclusion, a few of the more outstanding ones might be briefly gathered together.

1. Kirkland always lacked adequate financial support. Even after transferring his relations to the strong missionary societies, the financial situation did not actually improve. In 1796 when the school project had failed, the Scotch Missionary Society abandoned him without a pension, and his last days were spent in comparative poverty.

2. Poor leadership was the great weakness in most of his projects. We have already noticed how the agricultural program failed for this reason. Kirkland never trained his own leaders and with one exception those who came to him were not suited to the task. Toward the end of his life, the neighboring missionary

of the Stockbridge Indians refused to cooperate with him, and even urged the Indians to rebel against him. Evidence would seem to show that this was due to jealousy.

3. Denominational strife confused the Indians. We have already noticed how the French Catholic priests forced their way into the tribe. A little later lay Baptist and Methodist preachers made their appearance and organized missions among the Brothertown Indians. The most outstanding competitive missionary enterprise, however, was the Quaker effort (1796-99) which was centered among the Oneidas by the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. The Quakers were well financed and expended 2000 on farm and school equipment. The Indians did not appreciate the Quaker worship services, and after this brief effort, the missionaries retreated, leaving their property to the Pagan Party instead of giving it to the Oneida Nation as a whole.

4. Kirkland's own weaknesses retarded the success of the mission. He was caught in the speculation fever following the war, and invested heavily in a beautiful home on his tract of land near the Oriskany Creek.

The theological beliefs of the "New Light" school were preached to the Indians by Kirkland, and a study of the effects of these sermons, as a whole, would lead one to believe that they were conducive to much speculative discussions rather than to practical religious living. The Indians would listen to Kirkland but failed to follow him in many of his attempted reforms.

Kirkland's poor health also retarded the success of the mission. The eighteen months spent with the Senecas broke his physical strength and throughout the rest of his ministry, he suffered considerably. In the fall of 1793 he had a severe injury to his eye and this caused great suffering and partial blindness for several years.

5. The natural disposition of the Indian tended to retard the development of the mission. While Kirkland could hold their attention for a brief time, yet with the exception of a few outstanding individuals, the Indian tended to lack the stamina to hold to one project sufficiently long to carry it through. The inrush of the whites cooped the Indians up in small reservations, and the natives could not compete with their stronger neighbors.

6. The Government lacked a consistent Indian Policy during this period. The Indians were treated as separate nations, and the local missionary was not given any police control. Kirkland tried to develop a native police force, but the weakness of the Indians in the presence of rum, defeated this project. The lone missionary was not strong enough to counteract the forces arrayed against him.